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DE RUEHBU #1165/01 3001813
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P 271813Z OCT 09
FM AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4522
INFO RUCNMR/MERCOSUR COLLECTIVE
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC
RHMFSS/DEPT OF JUSTICE WASHINGTON DC
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C O N F I D E N T I A L BUENOS AIRES 001165

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/23/2029
TAGS: PREL PTER SNAR KTIP SENV AR
SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR MEETS ARGENTINE CABINET CHIEF FERNANDEZ

REF: (A) BUENOS AIRES 1017 (B) BUENOS AIRES 1148

Classified By: DCM Tom Kelly for reasons 1.4 (b) & (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: In her introductory call on Argentine Cabinet Chief Anibal Fernandez (AF), the Ambassador thanked AF for his role in strengthening bilateral relations and expressed appreciation for GOA cooperation on law enforcement issues. AF said he had always had good relations with the Embassy, but that with the new administration in Washington under President Obama's leadership, there was even more desire in Argentina for bilateral cooperation. AF regretted the anti-U.S. protests the Ambassador encountered in Mendoza (ref B) but argued that Argentina was not "anti-gringo." The Ambassador urged the GOA to show progress in investigating, prosecuting and convicting those responsible for trafficking in persons, and she underscored U.S. support for Argentine efforts to bring to justice those responsible for the 1994 bombing of the AMIA Jewish community center. AF said Argentina was "relentless" in going after traffickers in persons but admitted there were no TIP convictions yet. The Ambassador also flagged her desire to promote greater trade between the two countries, and AF responded by speaking at length about a recent labor dispute at a local food processing plant owned by Kraft Foods. End summary.

Bilateral Relations

¶2. (C) Accompanied by the DCM and polcouns, the Ambassador made her introductory call on Argentine Cabinet Chief Anibal Fernandez in his Casa Rosada office October 23 -- a meeting that had been originally scheduled for September 29 but postponed at AF's request. AF explained to the Ambassador, as he had done when they spoke by telephone on September 28, that he had thought it was ill-advised for the two of them to meet at a time when the media were insistently trying to turn a local labor dispute involving a U.S. company into a major bilateral crisis. AF also regretted the anti-U.S. protests the Ambassador had encountered in Mendoza (ref B), adding that "there are idiots all over the world." The Ambassador assured him that she had grown accustomed to student protests while serving on the University of California's Board of Regents. AF argued that Argentina was not "anti-gringo," insisting (as he has done with us before) that one could wear a t-shirt emblazoned with the U.S. flag and walk down any street in Buenos Aires without fear of harassment. AF said he had always had good relations with the Embassy, but that with the new administration in Washington under President Obama's leadership, there was even more desire in Argentina for bilateral cooperation -- and that we should take advantage of that. As a result, he said, there was an increasingly "fertile field" for bilateral cooperation.

Trafficking in Persons

¶ 13. (C) The Ambassador thanked AF for his role in strengthening bilateral relations and expressed appreciation for GOA cooperation on law enforcement issues. She noted that Argentina was still on the USG's Tier 2 Watch List for trafficking in persons (TIP), and she urged the GOA to show progress in investigating, prosecuting and convicting TIP criminals. AF said the GOA was "relentless" in going after TIP. Argentina's passage of legislation making TIP a federal crime had been a major step forward, but that, because of the timelines inherent in criminal prosecutions, convictions and sentences for TIP would still take some time. He also pointed out that prosecutors and judges were independent of the executive branch, but he added that he was committed to rooting out police involvement and complicity with TIP. In the tri-border area next to Brazil and Paraguay, he said the GOA was supporting a network of women who were gathering intelligence on organized crime, particularly TIP. He said he would send the Ambassador a recent internal GOA report summarizing progress against TIP, including the rescue of over 400 victims.

¶ 14. (C) AF said he was appalled by the conditions in which these victims had been found, often literally imprisoned. He said the GOA had sought to provide protection to rescued victims in order to encourage them to testify against their traffickers. He recalled an unfortunate case where a victim testified that when she became pregnant, her traffickers had forced her to abort. She told the judge where the fetus had been buried, and a buried fetus was unearthed at that location. Under Argentine law, however, the authorities were then required to press abortion charges against the TIP victim. Eventually, the judge was able to dismiss the charges, but the case, AF said, was a "pathetic" example of how victims could still be held criminally liable for acts committed against their will. AF claimed that another obstacle for prosecuting TIP was the unavailability of legal instruments such as plea bargaining.

Going after Iran

¶ 15. (C) The Ambassador praised President Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner's UNGA speech for calling on Iran to cooperate with Argentine efforts to investigate and prosecute the 1994 bombing of the AMIA Jewish community center that killed 85 persons. The Ambassador underscored U.S. support for those GOA efforts.

Trade and Labor Issues

¶ 16. (C) The Ambassador also flagged her desire to promote greater trade between the two countries, and AF responded by speaking at length about a recent labor dispute at a local food processing plant owned by Kraft Foods. He noted that he had served as labor minister in the province of Buenos Aires and was therefore well-acquainted with the players and the issues. He said that, at one point during the strike, he had urged Buenos Aires provincial governor Scioli to order a complete police blockade of the plant, and not even allow cigarette vendors to supply the workers inside. He thought the Kraft labor dispute was unlikely to repeat itself elsewhere, because it had involved Revolutionary Communist Party (PCR) members who were extremists and isolated. He noted that there would be union elections at the Kraft plant on November 14 and implied that the extremists would not win any positions.

Comment

¶ 17. (C) Once again, with his rapid-fire discourse, AF showed himself to be in command of his brief and cognizant of what we want to hear. We also know that he is not the most

reliable interlocutor, since this meeting took place just a few days after he publicly and falsely claimed he had called the Ambassador to convey his regrets about the Mendoza protest (ref B, para 8). Due to his position and influence with the Kirchners, however, we intend to continue taking advantage of the accessibility he offers us.

MARTINEZ